

RealityHR

People Driven Business Growth

CORONAVIRUS GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYERS

ABSENCE, PAY & HOMEWORKING

24.03.20

GET IN TOUCH TO FIND OUT HOW WE CAN HELP...



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COMMUNICATION WITH STAFF

- Most importantly, staff should only be coming into the workplace for work that absolutely can't be done from home.
- Wherever possible, employees should be working from home.
- Tell staff that they must not come into work if they are feeling unwell with a cough/temperature.
- Check all staff contact details are up to date in case you need to contact them outside of work.
- Reassure staff that you are monitoring Government advice and planning ahead for a variety of scenarios and share as much information as you can about this contingency planning.
- Stop all business travel and face to face meetings and use phone and video technology wherever possible.
- For employees that must attend work, provide tissues and 60% alcohol hand sanitiser if you can. Remind staff about hand washing, and not shaking hands, and staying 2 metres away from anyone else.

WORKING FROM HOME

Remember that you have a responsibility for the health and safety of your staff, wherever they are working from – including their home. You will want to consider:

- What equipment do your employees need to work from home?
 - Do you need to carry out risk assessments on equipment such as displays, working areas, any trips or hazards?
 - Are your remote IT systems and data storage facilities up to date and secure?
 - How best to manage performance of staff working remotely? You may prefer to look at managing by results rather than just saying they must work 8 hours a day. Setting specific targets/tasks and deadlines will better gauge if someone has had a successful and productive day - rather than the number of hours worked.
 - Availability for phone or video meetings.
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Workers must work from home wherever possible. Communicate this to staff and emphasise that they MUST self-isolate if they have coronavirus symptoms or meet other criteria for self-isolating.

We are able to supply a suitable Home Working Risk Assessment form should you require this, and the HSE website provides assessment checklists for Display Screen Equipment (DSE) users.

ABSENCE

Anyone with symptoms should remain in self-isolation for 7 days. Additionally, the latest advice is now to adopt “whole household isolation” – so an entire family or group of cohabitants should isolate for 14 days if one of them shows symptoms.

- Relax the usual requirement to produce a GPs note after the first 7 days. Staff can access an isolation note here: <https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/>
- It's fine to ask why someone is self-isolating to help you understand if it is genuinely required – this may be difficult to establish in some cases, so be cautious.
- Consider absences that might arise if parents have to cover childcare now that schools are closed. Think about whether they can work from home or not – this is not always possible depending on the needs of the child.

HOLIDAY

If your current holiday year ends on 31 March it is reasonable to ask employees to use any outstanding leave before the end of the holiday year including time off that was booked for holidays that have now been cancelled.

If your contract states that holiday can only be carried over at the company's discretion you are OK to refuse requests to carry into next year.

Going into the new holiday year it is only reasonable to ask employees to use holiday if they have already accrued it.

PAY

- People who are ill or are self-isolating because of Government guidance are entitled to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) if they cannot carry out any work remotely.
- The Government has committed to covering the cost of SSP for 14 days for businesses with fewer than 250 staff. You may choose to enhance pay over and above SSP – be sure to communicate this clearly. If an employee is sick they will be entitled to any company sick pay outlined in their contract of employment, however, if they are isolated but not actually sick you may not have to pay company sick pay depending on how your contract is worded.
- Vulnerable Employees - Employees who have reduced immunity, are pregnant or are aged over 70 have been advised that they need to be careful and should work from home if this is possible but are not yet instructed by the Government to self-isolate. They would not however currently receive SSP if they were to choose to self-isolate. There is due to be an update on this later this week from the government when it is thought very likely the advice will change to formally instruct these people to self-isolate and would then be entitled to SSP if they cannot work remotely.
- Extremely Vulnerable – Recent additional guidance has been issued for employees who are severely vulnerable: This group should be shielded and isolate themselves for 12 weeks, no further guidance has been provided about pay entitlement for these employees. If an employee falls into this group, they will be contacted directly via the NHS. You should think about the best way to protect them if they cannot work from home.
- If you send an employee home who says they aren't sick and doesn't meet any Government criteria for isolating you will have to pay them as normal.
- Those who are self-isolating but able to work from home and are doing so should be paid in full as usual for the hours they work.
- If parents are unable to work due to school closures, the first 1-2 days of absence would be covered by the Right to Unpaid Leave to Care for Dependents – after that paid holiday or authorised unpaid leave could be used.